23: Benedict
113, 197, 601
●

ALl Southeast Asia
Lahu AP13
●Laotians AM8

/For a linguistic reconstruction of the kinship terminology of the Lahu and Laotians, see ALl Southeast Asia, 23: Benedict: category 116, pp. 198-205, 230-235./

648 In the meantime the carefree populace of Luang-Prabang lived
175° happy and at peace. This is at least the opinion of its annalists who, in confirmation of the adage which states that happy peoples have no history, begin and end their account of Souka-Seum's reign with this categorical assertion.

175° The Meo Migration. It was about this time that the first migra-
563 tion of "Meos" occurred in the principality. The chroniclers make
167 no mention of it, doubtless because it was peaceful on the whole and did not affect the tranquillity of the Laotian peoples. Indeed, the newcomers settled on the highest summits of Tran-Ninh and Luang-Prabang, in completely uninhabited regions where even the Khas had never ventured and which were outside the scope of the natives and their leaders.

Farmers and caravaneers, the Meos were above all among the worst denuders of the forests. They must have been driven south out of Se-Tchouen and Yunnan by the need to find new territories which were rich in forests, and also by their undisciplined temperament which could not endure /213/ the authority of the Chinese mandarins. They settled first on the wooded peaks of the Houa-Phan and of Tonkin, then on those of Upper Laos where they found the same kind of habitat as in the cold lands which they had fled. Without religion, without priests, without writing and obedient only to sorcerers who held absolute sway over their essentially vain and credulous character, they lived there in small independent groups, laying waste to the forest in order to grow poppies and maintaining with the neighboring groups only those relations which were strictly indispensable to marketing their opium (1).

/113/ 1. Settlement by the Meos encountered more resistance in Tonkin. "I recall," writes Deo-van-Tri in his Memoires, "having seen my country (Lai-Chau) invaded by the Meos who were called 'White Flags' about 1848. They disturbed the tranquillity of the land, but my honorable father Cam-Sinh finally came to an agreement with them and put them at liberty to settle wherever they wanted on the high plateaus of the region." In the following year, in order to spare his sons from violent family dissensions, Cam-Sinh entrusted Deo-van-Tri and his brother Cam-Heune to the king of Luang-Prabang, who placed them in a pagoda with his own children (Revue indochinoise, August 31, 1904.)

beyond comprehension. Only the British are triumphing." 648*

So greatly was this the case that Siam abandoned all ideas of 175*
using French support in order to check British mastery. In consequence it had to cede England its Malay provinces /218/ and seek compensations from Cambodia. This latter kingdom was in the process of becoming a vast Siamese province when events suddenly sprang up in Cochinchina which once again modified Bangkok's stubborn plans for extension towards the east.

Then followed, successively, the breaking off of diplomatic relations between Franch and Annam, the occupation of Tourane and Saigon by Admiral Rigault de Genouilly (1859), the capture of Mytho by Admiral Charner (1861), the capture of Bienhoa by Admiral Bonard (1862) and finally the peace treaty of June 5, 1862 which sanctioned the French conquests in the Cochinchinese delta.

This rapid page of history was heavy with consequences, then unsuspected, for Luang-Prabang, and transpired too far away from the thick Laotian forests to awaken any echo there. It was in the peaceful atmosphere of the smiling villages of the Upper Mekong that Henri Mouhot, who was the first to reveal the splendors of Angkor and the existence of the kingdom of Millions of Elephants to the western world, came to die in 1861 (1).

1. With the cooperation of various London geographical and 113
zoological societies Henri Mouhot, who was born at Montbeliard on May 15, 1826, organized an expedition to Indo-China for the purpose of pursuing studies in natural history, particularly in entomology and omithology. He visited Bangkok, Chantaboun, Ayuthya (1858), Oudong, Battambang and discovered the ruins of Angkor (1860), crossed the forest of the "King of Fire" in the north of Siam and died at Luang-Prabang on November 10, 1861. The account of his voyages, first published in the Tour du Monde, appeared in English in London, then in French in Paris in 1868 in the "Bibliotheque rose illustree" of the Hachette publishing house.

/219/ Voyage and death of Henri Mouhot in Luang-Prabang (1861).

Although this traveler did not have time to undertake as de- 114
tailed a study of the land as he had done for Siam and Cambodia, at least the few pages of his travel log -- the last pages -- which he devotes to the principality reflect the extremely keen impressions

K Attopeu and p. 160, the first known rebellion of the Khas
L of Bassac.
669
175* In fact the region had long been a vast supply ground for slaves --
563 "Annamites generally, whom the turbulent and hardly Khas went and kidnaped on the other side of the watershed chain" and bartered on the banks of the Mekong for buffalo, gongs, metals and cloth, of which they stood in permanent need.

K The cause of the rebellion of 1901, which /345/ arose in the re-
/567/ gion of Oubone and spread like wildfire, remains highly obscure. Doubtless the abolition of slavery by King Chulalongkorn and the prohibition against engaging in this traffic which was pronounced by our first administrators were not unconnected with the mystical fervor which agitated the Khas, who were tacitly supported by those
K Laotian functionaries who had suddenly been deprived of profitable
/791/ dealings. Whatever the case may be, these basically superstitious people were inflamed by their sorcerers or "Phou-Mi-Boun," who resembled messiahs and in whose supernatural gifts they had an unshakeable faith, and they declared war against the established order for the purpose of imposing the authority of their ringleaders, who alone were worthy, in their eyes, of "governing men and causing justice to reign among them" (1). In March 1901 the situation had

L 1. Cf. J.-J. Dauplay, Les terres rouges du plateau des
K Boloven. Saigon, 1929, p. 55.
113

become so grave on the plateau of the Bolovens that M. Remy, the
L government commissioner in Saravane, was surrounded together with
K some fifteen militiamen in the pagoda of Thateng by 1500 Khas,
669 almost all of whom were armed with flintlock rifles, and that he
175* owed his own salvation only to a forceful resistance. "A few days
563 later the whole plateau was up in arms. All the villages /346/ had followed the Phou-Mi-Boun, without distinction of race. They had, moreover, scarcely any other alternative, for the lukewarm and hesitant individuals were simply massacred" (1).

1. Cf. J.-J. Dauplay, op. cit. /Les terres rouges du plateau des Boloven. Saigon, 1929./, p. 60.

The rebels' success had no aftermath, however, and thanks to

115: Le Boulanger--221 H-4 (no date) 1931 AM1 Indochina
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glades, but "instead of the oil trees, bogus teaks with their whitish foliage and their trunks deeply dented with wide grooves, we find gigantic, shade-giving pines; and instead of the bare, powdery or viscous soil, a fine level turf on which it is a pleasure to walk and where it is enjoyable to linger and slow one's pace" (2). 133 137

(2) Letter from Captain Rivière, reproduced by Captain Gosselin in Le Laos et le Protectorat français, 1900. [113]

It is also a region of wild beasts, and the inhabitants of the muong of Mă-Ha-Saĭ come there every year to hunt elephants. [136]

At the very source of the Sé-Bang-Faĭ there springs up a noteworthy peak about 1200 meters high from which many watercourses flow down to the Annam coast.

South of this point the Annamitic Chain drops to give way to the gap of Aĭ-Lao (about 410 meters in altitude) on the road from Savannakhèt to Quang-Tri. Then the chain rises to form walls which are often more than 2000 meters high in the provinces of Saravane and Attopeu. Thus, Pou-Atonat has an altitude of about 2500 meters. It is an important orographic center from which spring the Sékhong and the Poyo, which belong to the Mékong basin, and also the Song-Bnong, a tributary of the Song-Caĭ which is a coastal river of Annam. 133

Between the Sédone and the Sékhong, at about the 15th parallel, stands the remarkable plateau of the Bolovens, which takes its name from the Kha tribe which inhabits it. It is a mass about 100 kilometers in diameter, and its height varies between 600 and 1200 meters. Travelers who have explored it have extolled the mildness of the climate, the wealth of the vegetation, the beauty of the plains and the abundance of water, so [50] that Dr. Harmand suggested the idea that the plateau, which could easily be linked by road with the port of Tourane, might be made into the administrative center and sanatorium of our Indo-Chinese empire. [132]

The part which the plateau may be called on to play in the future has been somewhat exaggerated. It would be imprudent to envisage it as a wonderland, [illustration here] an eldorado destined to a great future from the administrative, commercial and sanitary point of view. Today it is a plateau with well-cultivated slopes which yield fine harvests of cardamom and rice, as well as tobacco, cotton and Chinese nettles [ortie de Chine], and is inhabited by gentle, peaceful folk who live in handsome, well kept-up villages. 133 241 361

part of the natives' diet? Do not its alluvia yield the cotton, tobacco and indigo which are indispensable to the Laotian, and does not the river itself, in the high water period, transport the wood needed for cooking food, so that, in a manner of speaking, it has only to recede in order to collect firewood? Finally, from the commercial point of view, is not the Mékong the great fluvial artery and the only practical route joining Yunnan to Saigon? M. Blancsubé, a former deputy for Cochinchina, envisaged the use to which the Mékong could be put when he said:

"I see in our establishment throughout the whole Mékong valley, the means of making flow into Saigon the products of thirty kingdoms and tribes scattered along the river, as well as those of Yunnan and those of the interior provinces of China. I see the means of making Saigon into one of the greatest storehouses in the world, and making it the queen of the Far East."

The vision is a tempting one. Unfortunately, the reality is quite another thing. On the one hand the orientation of trade towards Bangkok was climaxed by the completion of the Korat railroad, while on our part the problem of making the Mékong navigable from Yunnan to the sea is still far from having been solved.

Looked at as a whole, the Mékong flows first in a largely north and south direction as far as Ban-Houé-Pak-Kop (1) (where the Houé-

(1) Pak = mouth, junction of rivers.

Kop flows into its right bank), then turns suddenly eastward in the gorge which it has cut around the plateau which forms the last stage of the Sib-Song-Pahn-Na.

Macey (2) says, in this connection, that one can almost certainly

(2) "Cinq ans au Laos." Lecture delivered before the Society of Commercial Geography [Société de Géographie commerciale] on November 19, 1895.

accept the hypothesis that in a relatively recent geological epoch the Mékong flowed into the sea in the Gulf of Siam through the valley of the present-day Ménam. The other branch of the Mékong which goes down to the sea through Cambodia and Cochinchina was a continuation of the Nam-Hou. It was only when an upheaval or

133 There is only one mountainous region of note in its whole course through the plains. This is formed by the spur which forces it to describe the bend of Pak-Moun and, on the right bank, by the mountains of Bassac which tower precipitously above it. Then the river spreads out more and more until [54] it forms the altogether characteristic group of the Si-Pan-Don (four thousand islands) above the Khône waterfalls, where it falls down to its lower reach which is subject to the special conditions of the Ton-Lé-Sap risings.

[103] The origin of the word Mékong is not certain. It is doubtless an abbreviation of Mé-Nam-Kong, that is to say, the mother of the waters which come from Kong (1).

(1) This does not refer to Khong, the former capital of Lower Laos, but to another Kong situated at about 22° 20' N. latitude and well known as a transit point for caravans going from Burma to China.

The total length of its course is approximately 4200 kilometers, about half of which belongs to Laos. It is one of the largest rivers in the world. The length of its course, which is approximately the same as that of the Amour or the Hoang-Hô, would place it tenth among all the world's rivers.

In addition to the region of Khong and the Khône waterfalls, where the river spreads out over ten kilometers and even more, there is an average breadth of 1200 to 1500 meters in the Bassac reach. In the Kemmarat rapids its average width is from 300 to 500 meters, but there are also narrows where it is scarcely 100 meters wide.

In the Vien-Tiane reach it has an average width of 300 to 800 meters, but between Vien-Tiane and Luang-Prabang it narrows down to less than 100 meters. Above Luang-Prabang and as far as Xieng-Khong its average width is only 150 to 250 meters. Then it spreads out again through low islands, to narrow down once and for all towards Tang-Hô.

The area of its basin has been estimated to be a million square kilometers.

"The rate of flow of the Mekong (2) has not yet been measured

[113] (2) Vivien de Saint-Martin, Nouveau Dictionnaire de géographie universelle, 1887.

with the same degree of precision as those of the Irrawaddy, the

503 member of the Lagrée mission, in 1891 (1), "have resulted in a plan

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(1) L. Delaporte, La grande voie commerciale de l'Indo-Chine, 1891.

505 to establish a complete service serving the course of the Mékong, in order to divert its trade to the heart of the kingdom of Siam via the fine Sé-Moun river and then take it by railway to the capital and the sea. This plan is now in the process of full achievement. Two steamships will very shortly be introduced, one on the middle course of the river between Bassac and Kemmarat with its headquarters at Pak-Moun at the river junction, and the other on the Sé-Moun between Pak-Moun and Khorat at the point where the river ceases to be navigabl and this service will be completed by a railway joining Khorat to Bangkok."

505 It was thus a question of out-distancing the Siamese sloops. 503 Governor General Piquet himself became interested in the matter and embarked on board the Cantonnais (October 1891) in the hope 654 of passing the Khône rapids and showing the French flag in the upper reach. The Argus, under the command of Ensign Guissez and serving as a look-out ship for the Cantonnais, reached Khône and tried to reconnoiter the passage. The latter had been shown by the inhabitants to M. Pelletier and Dr. Mougeot, two Europeans who then held the concession to the large island of Ca-Lomnieu, and was accessible at certain times of the year to pirogues coming down the river. But the season was far advanced (it was the end of October). The low water made it impossible to attempt the desired trial, and the Cantonnais had to return to Saigon.

In the meantime the Argus anchored in the pass of Ka-Sedam between the rapids of Tat-Vai and Tat-Liou in order to complete the studies which had been begun and the exploration of the river as far upstream as possible. For more than two years this launch tried to negotiate the passes, but failed because of its large draft, its instability and its lack of speed.

The persevering energy and efforts of its commander were not lost, however, for they prepared the way for the work subsequently undertaken in these parts.

It being impossible to find a suitable passage for [65] [Illustration] [66] [Blank page] [67] steamships, a transhipment railway was built

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"The administration of public works of Cochinchina was particularly responsible for carrying out the work. The operation was directed by Messrs. Gubiand, the engineering director of public works, and Crouzat, the chief clerk of the department of civil engineering [conducteur principal des ponts et chaussées], and was fully successful despite the haste, the difficulties and the mishaps and tribulations which we had to undergo.

"On October 31, 1893, five months after the mission's arrival in Saigon, two ships, the Massie and the Ham-Luong, had passed the Khône waterfalls.

"The Ham-Luong was a sloop from Cochinchina which was sent at the last [68] moment and in all haste to replace the La Grandière numerically and provisorily, the latter being disabled below the falls as the result of grave damage to the engine."

After they had been floated in the upper reach the Massie and the Ham-Luong pushed on to Bassoc immediately, then to the junction with the Sé-Moun. The Massie finally reached Kemmarat on February 28, 1894, after successfully passing the 120 kilometers of rapids just below it. There the Massie had to wait for high water before it could pass the Keng-Sa, one of the most dangerous obstacles in this region. In the high water season of 1894 it was in the Vien-Tiane reach, where it showed the French flag over an extent of more than 500 kilometers. On September 5, 1894, the La Grandière went to Khône in its turn, on its way from one reach to another, and then in November caught up with the Massie which it soon passed. Finally in August 1895 Lieutenant Commander Simon took the La Grandière through the series of rapids stretching over a distance of 350 kilometers between Vien-Tiane and Luang-Prabang, which he reached on September 1.

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"This brilliant success demonstrated France's power to the friendly and hostile populations of the banks of the Mékong. Through the more frequent sight of our officers, our weapons and our cruising steamships, which ammounted to ambulatory offices, it strengthened the work accomplished by our diplomats on the left bank, which belonged to us henceforth" (1).

[113]

(1) Lanier, L'Asie, 1898. Selected readings in geography.

We rejoice at being able to render deserved homage here to the abilities of Commander Simon who, in the midst of the greatest

This preventive measure is recommended by Laveran, who discovered the haematozoon of paludism, and is followed by a great many persons. It has always yielded excellent results, even among the natives who are also subject to the fever (1).

(1) According to a report by the Superior Resident in Laos, in which mention is made of a note by M. Morin, the government commissioner in Vien-Tiane, there is a kind of liana in this province which is quite common in the region and which the Laotians call Khua-Khao-hô.

This liana, which the Siamese call Bora-phet, is no other, according to the dictionary by Pallegoix, than the Cocculus verrucosus of the Menispermaceae family.

The taste of the sap which it contains, when newly cut, is particularly bitter. When dried the liana itself retains a very pronounced taste of quinine.

Native doctors use it in various preparations for treating obstinate fevers and jaundice in its various forms.

At the same time as the Khao-hô, pieces of heartwood from two hardwood trees are generally used. We have been unable to discover their exact names, but the active medicinal agent, according to the natives, is primarily Cocculus verrucosus (Bulletin économique de l'Indo-Chine, August 1, 1900).

[121] The daily ingestion of a small quantity of quinine keeps the blood in a toxic state for fever-bearing microbes, and it must be constantly saturated if one wishes to prevent their invasion and growth.

Some persons also get along very well on a treatment which consists in taking a purgation of sodium or magnesium sulphate, or else an emetic of ipecacuanha, every three months (April, July, October and January).

Whenever a feeling of torpor, stiffness in the nape of the neck or the shivers which are the forerunners of fever manifest themselves, one and a half to two grams of ipeca and one gram of quinine, after vomiting has stopped, will overcome the illness and reduce the attack to its most benign form.

In sum, one can keep in excellent health in Laos, by following these few recommendations, if one has a good stomach, solid insides and an intact liver. A stay in this country can therefore not be

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174 It is true that all the races and varieties enumerated above can be found in Laos, but it is impossible to say what their exact origins were or to gain a complete knowledge of their history, their migrations and the details of their settlement in the land.

For certain regions inhabited by several races we do possess, however, either Phong Savadan or local annals, or else legends written on palm leaves, or even accounts which have been handed down by word of mouth. The manuscripts are, in general, rather incorrect and full of interpolations and embellishments inevitably due to the scribes. They are the only written documents.

The architecture might also give us useful information on all these questions, but the monuments are either too recent and contain nothing of any interest or else they are mute on the events which motivated their edification, as well as on the events contemporaneous with them. None of this evidence, whether it be in the form of manuscripts, temples or pagodas, offers the guarantees of authenticity and the ensemble of precise details which are needed in order to leave the realm of hypotheses and [129] [Illustration] [130] [Blank page] [131] deductions, no matter how adroit and logical these may be, when we attempt to settle in exact fashion the evolution of races in the basin of the Great River.

Various theories, based on documents which are questionable in varying degrees, have been put forth by explorers and travelers. We shall here submit to the reader's judgment those which seem to afford the best summary of this somewhat obscure question.

Here, first, is the opinion of the Superior Resident in Laos (1).

[113] (1) Le Laos Français. (Revue indo-chinoise, Nos. 82 ff., 1900.)

"Laotian legends claim that all the races which now inhabit Indo-China came out of one and the same gourd in Dien-Bien-Phu (Annamite style) or Muong-Theng (Laotian style), a vast plateau situated in the northeast part of the valley of the Nam-Hou. The sons of this gourd are said to have spread eastward towards the China Sea, southward along the Mékong and the Ménam, and westward towards Burma. Whether we will or not, this gourd reminds us of Noah's Ark.

"On the other hand, if we consult the chronological list of the kings of Luang-Prabang, we note that after six kings of foreign origin, the first of which came from India and the second from Cambodia, there were four kings of Kha race, after which Laotians coming from

193 while a prefix before the noun transforms it into a demonstrative adjective. The comparative is expressed by a suffix placed after the noun.

There are eleven expressions to indicate the superlative. They are used as prefixes or suffixes in accordance with fixed rules.

Personal pronouns. There are eleven pronouns for the first person which vary in accordance with the status of the speaker and the person being spoken to.

There are ten for the second person and eight for the third.

Possessive pronouns. There is no such pronoun in Siamese. It is replaced by the genitive of the person or animal which possesses.

Relative pronouns. They are in the number of three, and stand before the object which they modify.

Interrogative pronouns. They are five in number. When repeated they become relative or indefinite and signify, for example, whoever instead of who, whatever instead of what, etc.

Verbs. Verbs do not have conjugations, moods, tenses or persons. Like nouns, they are always invariable. Some semblance of conjugation may nevertheless be achieved by means of particles or auxiliary words. These words, in the number of eleven, change the [144] meaning of sentences by expressing an action or an idea, according as they stand before the verb or after.

Principal adverbs. There are seventy-eight principal adverbs. Moreover, certain nouns or adjectives take an adverbial form by means of seven particles which are placed after them.

Prepositions and conjunctions. There are twenty-eight main prepositions and twenty-five conjunctions (1).

• [113]

(1) Pallegoix, Dictionnaire siamois-français-anglais, 1896.

212 194 The Lao or Laotian language. The Lao alphabet is composed of twenty-eight letters divided into fourteen simple or compound consonants and fourteen vowels or diphthongs. They are divided into three classes, as follows:

1. Six letters on a rising or aspirated tone;
2. Eight letters on a middle or recto tone;
3. Fourteen letters on a falling or low tone.

To obtain the grave, long grave, short, open and close tones, signs and accents are used. These may be placed above or below the consonant, or may be formed by joining certain vowels and

as a blessing. 791

One fact worthy of note is that the "Phi-pop"--men, women and even adolescents--are extremely intelligent folk with lively eyes and full of a strong will and energy. They know [Illustration here] a host of recipes and therapeutic formulas which have been handed down to them by their parents. They might be described as bonesetters or people who have medicine as a sideline, and who act on weak minds and nervous temperaments by the power of suggestion. "Phi-pop" women and girls are usually quite pretty. 755 156

One of the methods most widely used to gain the favor of the "Phis" is to play deafening music. 755 533

"It is not at all unusual to hear diabolic and uninterrupted music in a Laotian house for several days and nights running. In this house there is a person who is seriously ill. All the noise is designed to frighten or to assuage the spirit in the sick person's body and to persuade or force it to [153] leave the body of the invalid. The sick person generally succumbs under the waves of this curative but noisy harmony" (1).

(1) Le Laos français, op. cit. [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.] [113]

Religion of the Thais. They have neither pagodas nor bonzes, but practice ancestor worship and have a great veneration for the "Spirits or Genii," to whom they make offerings on all occasions. 771 769

In the first room of the house there stands a bamboo altar. The "Spirits" or "Phis" of dead forbears are supposed to inhabit this altar, which is composed of two different levels, the highest one for the male Phis and the other for the female Phis. At its foot there is an opening covered with an elliptical wooden ornament shaped like a mouth. It is there, on this "ancestors' mouth," that the head of the family places offerings and prayers, especially when a member of the family is sick. In principal an animal is never killed without some scrap of food or a few drops of blood being offered to the ancestors' mouth.

"Spirits, whether genii or demons, are everywhere--in the sky, on earth, in the forests, in the water. They are the object of a widespread cult over which individuals who might be described as 776 793 755

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wax candles decorated with flowers, cigarettes and a sum of money. (Author's note)

the family from the hands of her patient.

[751]
[792]

"Two or three days after her confinement ends the mother must go to the pagoda and give a few presents to the bonzes, who give her in return a few cotton threads which she fastens to her wrists " (4).

[113]

(4) Dr. Estrade, 1895. Dictionnaire et Guide franco-laotien.

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Cases of dystocia and other childbearing difficulties are very rare in Laos, thanks to the physiological law which decrees that childbirth shall occur all the more naturally insofar as one comes closer to the primitive type and as one's body has not been deformed either by certain professional attitudes or by artifices of dress. [191] But when any difficulty of this type does occur the Laotian midwives are extremely skilful. Their hands take the place of the steel instruments in our gynecological and surgical arsenal, and their results are usually successful both for mother and child.

[554]

When the newly delivered mother is allowed to get up there occur traditional feasts and celebrations, the brilliance of which varies with the status of the young mother's parents. It is generally during these happy gatherings that the bonzes or sorcerers choose the name which the newborn child is to bear. They usually base their choice on some peculiarity of the coloring or eyes, or on a phase of the moon. The name will be replaced by another if the child falls sick, for in this case, as they say, the old name was unpleasing to his "This," that is to say to his personal tutelary spirits.

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Infanticide. Scarcely any cases of infanticide can be cited in Laos, and abortions are extremely rare or at least very well hidden. For when cases do occur it is among members of a class which, because of the rank it holds, is anxious to conceal its faults from the mass of the people.

[554]

In popular belief abortion, whether voluntary or natural, is regarded as a punishment of heaven or as a case of aberration which cannot fail to draw down the utmost scorn on the guilty parties and their accomplices.

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Marriage. Marriage in Laos is made ready for long in advance, thanks to the liberty which young people of both sexes enjoy. The latter meet one another at every celebration and can communicate

313 "There are several kinds of bamboo. The large bamboo which is used to make boxes and floats is called mai-bane. The mai-tot is the male bamboo, [340] strong and slender, with its joints closer together. When provided with an iron point it is used for poling boats along in the rivers. The mai-an is the female bamboo, hollower and lighter, from which raft coverings and partition mats are made. It is the kind used to make kelates" (1).

• [113] (1) Revue des Deux Mondes. "A travers l'Indo-Chine. Le Haut Laos et le Mékong," by Mme Isabelle Massieu, August 1, 1900.

314 17. Rubber.

824 Rubber is called "Niang-Niut" in Laotian, which means, literally, elastic gum.

There are several plant varieties in Laos which supply a latex which becomes elastic after coagulation. Certain types of the ficus family, doubtless of the elastica genus, yield rubber of comparatively good quality. The plants which produce the most latex and that of the best quality, however, are lianas whose scientific nature has not yet been settled.

More than ten different kinds of rubber lianas are known. The Laotians call these "Khua-Mak-Niang, Khua-Hai, Khua-Niut-Niai, Khua-Mak-Som, Khua-Mak-Katong-Katiou, Khua-Khao-Pong, Khua-Lam-Sai, Khua-Tang-Tong, Khua-Som-Lam, Khua-Mak-Ka-Khay, Khua-Mak-Khao-Ngoua," etc.

It is quite certain that these diverse names do not refer to as many species which are dissimilar from the botanical point of view, but are merely different local terms used at widely separated points in order to designate the same lianas. Without any concern for their chief virtue, which is to supply latex rubber, the Laotians have named them for their appearance, the shape or type of their fruit, etc.

It seems likely that the varieties which we have just enumerated may be reduced to seven and perhaps less. We shall not be able to tell for sure until we have examined the stalks, leaves, flowers and fruits of the various species in a laboratory. The liana which is most widespread in Laos is the one bearing the name Khua-Mak-Khao-Ngoua or liana with fruits like buffalo horns. It is also called Khua-Mak-Som or liana with acid fruits. The latex is collected twice [341] each year, once in June or July (rainy season), and again in October or November (dry season). The first harvest yields only second grade rubber which is black and sticky. The second crop, which is less

banks of the Mekong and its larger tributaries. 248

It is also grown on former rais in the highlands of southern Laos. 311

The climate of the Mekong valley is essentially favorable to the production of cotton, but the extent of the plantings has so far been limited, because of the lack of outlets, to what is strictly necessary to satisfy current local consumption.

Farming methods, in the lowlands of Lower Laos as well as in the highlands, are extremely primitive. The brush is cleared from the piece of land chosen, then without either weeding or fertilization the seeds are sowed in holes made with a dibble. 248

Two varieties are grown:

1. The large-flowered variety (Fai-Dok-Niai), which is preferred as being more productive and having fewer seeds. It is sowed at the end of the rainy season, usually in October, and harvested in March. This variety is cultivated only on the banks of watercourses. Its average height is one meter.

2. The small-flowered variety (Fai-Dok-Noi). It is cultivated only on higher ground, on former rais or in mountainous regions and is similar to the variety found in northern Laos. [363] It is sowed and harvested at about the same times as the above, that is to say from May to July for sowing and November or December for harvesting. Its average height is .7 meter.

It is difficult to determine the yield per hectare, in view of the fact that the cotton fields are irregular and variable in shape and size. On the basis of results in a certain number of fields which were measured separately, however, we may hazard the approximate figure of 200 to 400 kilograms of raw cotton per hectare, depending on the type of soil and its disposition.

On-the-spot purchase prices vary appreciably between the two parts of Laos. In the northern part, for example, the second-grade cotton bought by the Chinese sells for 35 to 40 francs per hundred kilograms. [435]

This crop should be developed further, and in a later paragraph we shall outline the steps which might be taken (1).

(1) Based on the reports of the Superior Commandants of Upper and Lower Laos. [113]

SUGAR CANE. Sugar cane is cultivated everywhere, both in the hills and on the low prairies. It is used only for local consumption. 249

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2. The obligation on the part of the concessionnaire to rid the young teaks of the lianas which choke them;

3. The obligation to replant ten young teak shoots for every tree which is felled;

4. The obligation on the part of villages near groups of teaks to open up roads leading to these groups; a prohibition against making rais and cutting down trees without permission; the obligation to plant from fifty to a hundred teaks per house each year, depending on the remoteness of the village.

In return, the inhabitants of these villages need not fulfill the twenty days of labor drafts due each year.

Besides teak, we may recommend the planting of certain other trees, such as the "Mai-Niom-Pha" (mock mahogany), the "Mai-Thon" (mock walnut), the "Mai-Kha-Nioung" (mock rosewood), the "Mai-Lang-Dam" (ebony), etc.

The eucalyptus would doubtless grow well in certain regions of Laos.

PROVINCE EXPERIMENTAL GARDENS

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For several years now there have been experimental gardens in each commissionership. They serve as trial fields for the cultivation of certain European and Asian plants which are unknown or rare in Laos.

[396] These gardens are also schools of practical agriculture for the natives. Seeds and plants are distributed to the latter, and they are given extremely summary bits of information about certain plants whose cultivation would be advantageous from the point of view of commercial transactions. These gardens are destined to render services to future colonists, and the trials which are made there deserve encouragement.

Although not all heads of provinces possess the same degree of agricultural and horticultural knowledge, they devote the utmost zeal to making the most of their gardens. Seconded by their staff and guided by the enlightened counsels of the Superior Residency, of the department of Agriculture and of the directors of the botanical gardens of Indo-China, most of them have already achieved satisfactory results.

[113] The special periodicals such as the Bulletin économique de l'Indo-Chine, the Revue des cultures coloniales, etc. which are sent to each commissioner are of invaluable help in this connection (1).

(1) Some of the libraries in the commissionerships contain a book

Cochinchina, and this is quite a lucrative trade.

231 178 The following are the main points in Laos where the raising of oxen would have a good chance of success, in view of the nature of the soil and the forage plants which grow there:

1. Northern Laos. Valleys of the upper Nam-Tha; plain of Muong-Sing; plains of the Mekong and of the Nam-Hou in the province of Luang-Prabang; valleys of the Nam-Het and of the upper Song-Ca; plains of Tran-Ninh (2); plains between the Mekong, the Nam-Tone

[175 727]

(2) Tran-Ninh used to be the greatest livestock region in Laos as recently as thirty some years ago, and all the buffalo and oxen needed in nearby regions came from there. The occupation of the region by the Hos and its pitiless depopulation by the Siamese completely halted this form of industry. It is beginning to be reborn with the peace and order which we have brought to this region, and the herds are reforming. Exports have already begun again in the last year.

Livestock is the principal form of wealth of the region, and could yield high profits to a European company which had sufficient capital at its disposition to engage in large-scale breeding. (Bulletin économique de l'Indo-Chine, December 1900. Report of the Superior Resident on Tran-Ninh.)

[113]

and the Nam-Ngum, in the province of Vien-Tiane.

[405] 2. Southern Laos. Plain of Tha-Khek and basin of Mahasay, in the province of Cammon; plains of the Mekong, valleys of the Se-Bang-Hien and of its tributaries in the province of Song-Khone; plains between the Se-Set and the Sedone, valley of the Se-Katam, slope of Pou-Pai-Mai, in the province of Saravane; valleys of the Bla (1), of the Poko and of the Ayoun, in the province of

(1) The raising of oxen might be greatly increased here. In all the villages, especially the Catholic villages, I saw superb herds containing animals with every fine point. If breeding is not more extensive here, this is because the prices offered at Ang-Ke are not greatly higher than those at which the animals are sold in the region, since the Khas use large numbers of them to supplant buffaloes in their superstitious ceremonies. (Bulletin économique de l'Indo-Chine, December 1899. Notes by the Superior Commandant of Lower Laos on the eastern region of Lower Laos.)

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which the difficulty of communications is now impeding."
(Bulletin économique de l'Indo-Chine, loc. cit.)

[113] [Translator's note. Probably refers to December 1900 issue, "Rapport du Résident supérieur sur le Tran-Ninh."]

5. POSTAL AND TELEGRAPH SERVICE

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The telegraph network in Laos is quite complete. At the present time only three commissionerships are not served by a telegraph line, those of Tran-Ninh, the Hua-Pahn and Darlac. All the other provinces possess one or several telegraph offices, where postal service is also provided.

Examination of Plate VI will show the extent of the telegraph network in Laos. The lines are divided into two sections: the northern one which is under the jurisdiction of the Annam-Tonkin central office, and the southern one which is attached to the Cochinchina-Cambodia central office. [484] The two sections are not connected with one another, but soon will be. Tonkin will then be in communication with Cochinchina by means of a line which will cross all of Laos from north to south.

When this result has been achieved, that is to say when the Luang-Prabang-Vien-Tiane section has been completed, the Laotian network will be 2,283 kilometers long: 1,168 in Upper Laos and 1,115 in Lower Laos.

[505] By the terms of a contract between the administration and the Cochinchina River Merchant Fleet Company [Compagnie des Messageries Fluviales], the latter was made responsible for the transport of postal dispatches on the Mekong as far as Luang-Prabang (1). Outside

(1) This company receives an annual subsidy of 300,000 francs from the government of Indo-China for this purpose.

of the region of the river, and even in certain stretches served by the Company where service can be made more rapid, the administration has recourse either to human carriers or to pirogues.

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6. SERVICE BY THE RIVER MERCHANT FLEET [MESSAGERIES FLUVIALES]

Transport for merchandise and passengers is provided on the Mekong as far as Luang-Prabang by the Cochinchina River Merchant

505 Fleet Company [Compagnie des Messageries fluviales de Cochinchine].
Although the organization of this service is not perfect, it cannot be denied that the company has made an outstanding contribution to the development and prosperity of Laos, where its ships travel more than 20,000 marine leagues annually. M. Lagrillière-Beauclerc, in his interesting book A travers l'Indo-Chine (2), has given an

[113] (2) Lagrilliere-Beauclerc, A travers l'Indo-Chine, Paris, 1900.

excellent report, as follows, of the results obtained:

"To return to the considerable development of production occasioned by the establishment of the first regular service on the great river in the direction of Kratie and Laos, and to the business activity which has been the consequence thereof, it will suffice to say that the regular subsidized service, which was only weekly in the beginning and provided by an ordinary launch, is now provided twice weekly by [485] means of two rapid ships (1) and has competition in the form

(1) The Bassac and the Vien-Tiane.

of a large number of steam launches belonging to Chinese for the most part. These launches take on merchandise every day and transport hundreds of native passengers, Malays and Chinese, both upstream and downstram between Pnom-Penh and Kratie. Both banks of the river, where villages used to be widely scattered, are today populated and cultivated almost continuously.

"We should note, however, that so far these latter launches [Illustration here] have not gone upriver beyond Kratie. The first rapids of the river have frightened their owners, who leave it to the vessels of the River Merchant Fleet [Messageries fluviales] to provide postal and commercial communication with Laos.

"This service, which was begun in 1891 and which has the Bassac, a special steamship with a shallow draft and high speed, can only be provided during the high water period. It connects with that which the River Merchant Fleet organized in 1896 on the Mekong beyond Khone, serving Lower and Upper Laos as far as Luang-Prabang, and whose economic results are beginning to be felt. Indeed, an appreciable movement of exports to Cambodia and Cochinchina [486] is taking shape more and more in the Mekong valley. Even as early as 1897 and 1898, the vessels were scarcely sufficient to the need during the high water period. Large quantities of nep (rice suitable

China and Indo-China (1).

[113] (1) E. Picanon, Le Laos français. 1901, Challamel. [Paris.]

II

Laos, Thais and Khas. Although the Laotian legends attribute the same origin to all of these (Muang-Theng or Dien-Bien-Phu) and say that they all came from the same "gourd" (Nam-Tao-Phourt), it is hardly likely that the Laotians and the Khas have a common origin. Indeed, the characteristics which serve to distinguish the two races are too numerous and too marked, both from the point of view of the racial types themselves and as regards language, mores and religious beliefs.

Nor can it be affirmed that the Khas are the representatives of the aboriginal population, for before any of their people had mounted the throne of Luang-Prabang, six kings foreign to their race had already occupied it--if we may regard the list of the first kings of the land which is preserved in the Phong-Sa Va-Dan (annals of the kingdom) as correct--and of these conquering princes the first is said to have come from India, and the second from Cambodia.

In any case, the Khas are said to have preceded the Laotians in the land, and it was not until the reign of their fourth and last king that they are supposed to have been conquered and driven out or enslaved by the Laotians, who had come down from Dien-Bien-Phu. Since that time, and despite many revolts of which the last is almost recent, the Khas have never ceased being "a folk talliable and liable to forced labor at pleasure" for their vanquishers, and their name has become a synonym for a low person or slave in the current idiom. Not until 1895 were the Khas once and for all freed--freed is perhaps not the word, for in the strict sense they were never slaves--or at least summoned to enjoy a system of rule similar to that of the other natives and which left no margin for arbitrariness and vexations.

In designating Dien-Bien-Phu as the cradle of the Laotian people, or at least in attributing to the Laotians and the Thais a common origin, legend seems to be in agreement with reality. There are indeed many points of resemblance and contact between the two peoples. The type is invariably the same, although finer in the native of Luang-Prabang than in the native of Lai-Chau or Dien-Bien-Phu. Not more than two hundred years ago the Laotians still wore, like the black Thais, the Annamite costume and their hair wound in a coil. It was doubtless after contact with the Siamese--who had themselves

563 in a few particulars. They all inhabit the peaks of mountains, where they generally engage in the cultivation of poppies and maize.

[439 241] Hos. The Hos are genuine Chinese who came in with the caravans from Yunnan and settled in the land to engage in trade or to grow cotton (1).

(1) According to a monograph by Government Commissioner Grand.

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APPENDIX XVIII
NOTE ON THE EASTERN REGION OF LOWER LAOS (1)

[113]

(1) Extract from a report by Colonel Tournier, Superior Commandant of Lower Laos. (Bulletin Economique de l'Indo-Chine, 1900, No. 19.)

PRESENT STATUS OF THE DIFFERENT KHA TRIBES

563 TRIBES LIVING ON THE GREAT ANNAMITIC CHAIN. 1. The tribe of Tha-Hoi may be regarded as being entirely pacified. It is a dependency of both Annam and Laos, but the spheres of influence of the two lands were perfectly delimited at the time of the establishment by Annam of the administrative post in Lao-Bao.

2. The Khon-Tou-Khas, the Ve-Khas and the Alak Khas are completely pacified and extremely tranquil. They are dependencies of Saravane.

Between the high valleys of the Se-Kemane and the Sesane (where the word Legnau, which is unknown in the region, is found on the Pavie map), there is an absolutely deserted region which serves as a buffer between the abovementioned tribes and the Cedangs.

[316] 563 567 3. The great tribe of the Cedangs, so far unconquerable. It occupies both sides of the chain, and its villages are situated in extremely difficult positions. The land is very poor, and until the last few years, besides the iron deposits which they work, their real commerce was the slave trade. All the Annamite slaves of the Mekong valley, both on the left bank and the right, came from raids made by these tribes in Annamite territory, even down as far as the sea. The abolition of slavery in Laos was a great blow to them, but since it is absolutely necessary for them to procure buffalo and oxen in order to live and especially for their superstitious practices, they still continue to make occasional captures in Annam and find a market for

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Having made these reservations, we are justified in concluding that I is a type of rubber which [138] is appreciably superior to II, although II deserves to be classified among the very good varieties of gum.

One last remark is, however, necessary. Before giving any final pronouncement as to the value of a type of rubber it is indispensable to subject it to the test of time, since its value is in direct proportion to its resistance to resinification. Under this heading I can nevertheless indicate already that rubber from the Khua-nhut-nhai (sample II) was subjected for three months to the worst kind of preservation conditions and that it withstood this trial admirably, not becoming subject to any resinification and not losing any of its elasticity.

There does not seem to be any doubt, moreover, but that the method of extracting rubber by grinding the bark gives a much higher yield of gum than can be obtained by the extraction method of bleeding the liana (assuming equal weights of fresh liana to be used in both cases).

I shall add, by way of indication, that according to the replies sent in answer to a questionnaire which was prepared under my direction at the request of a private corporation which exploits the rubber lianas of Laos, it appears to be a proven fact that cutting completely through the Khua-nhut-nhai lianas in no way compromises their vitality, on the express condition that the cutting be made above the level of the buds. Repeated bleedings of the same branch, on the other hand, yield an increasingly watery latex with an increasingly lower gum content.

The above information seems to me to be such that it might usefully be communicated to the agents of the administration, for it constitutes yet another argument in favor of exploiting the lianas exclusively by the method of grinding up the bark.

[113]

(Bulletin économique de l'Indo-Chine, January 1901, No. 31.)

III

It is of interest to note that the Superior Resident in Laos, following a long trip which he had just made between the Nam-Hou and the Mekong, remarked on the presence everywhere of numerous rubber lianas.

These lianaf had not as yet been noted in the west. Colonel Tournier gave instructions for immediate exploitation to all the native chieftains who were not acquainted with the liana or its value.

149: Reinach G-3 (no date)1901 AMI Indochina
Laotians AM8

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